

Report of the Eleventh Meeting of the CGIAR Oversight Committee

*October 26 and 29, 1996
Washington, D.C.*

The CGIAR Oversight Committee (OC) held its eleventh meeting at the World Bank headquarters on October 26 and 29, 1996 in conjunction with the CGIAR's 1996 International Centers Week. Participating in the meeting were: Paul Egger (Chair), Andrew Bennett, Fernando Chaparro, Teresa Fogelberg, John Lewis, and Selçuk Özgediz (Secretary). Cyrus Ndiritu sent his regrets.

The agenda consisted of the following items:

- 1. Partnership with NARS*
- 2. System Review*
- 3. CGIAR Governance*
- 4. Center governance*
- 5. Due diligence matters*
- 6. Internal matters*

The OC also interacted with the CGIAR Chair Ismail Serageldin regarding the System Review and CGIAR governance matters.

1. Partnership with NARS

The OC reviewed the post-Lucerne progress made by the CGIAR in strengthening its partnership with NARS, including the preparations for the Global Forum organized in connection with the CGIAR meeting in Washington. It noted that several of its members had made major contributions to the System's progress in this area (e.g., Vir Chopra, Cyrus Ndiritu, and Fernando Chaparro).

The OC noted that the global forum and the regional fora were to serve different functions. The regional fora, being closer to action, would be concerned with development of concrete programs and operationalization of partnerships. In this sense, priority setting would be an important concern of the regional fora. The OC observed a need to make partnerships more operational by linking consultations in the Regional Fora with CGIAR priority setting and program development.

The global forum, on the other hand, would be concerned with defining broad strategies, guiding principles, and modes and opportunities for collaboration in the global agricultural research system.

The CGIAR has an important role to play in both types of fora. TAC can play an important role through its analysis of global research needs and strategies—as an input to the global forum. TAC and the centers can add to the analytical capacity of the regional fora in the identification of priorities and possibilities for collaboration.

The recent developments in formation of partnerships bring to question the future role of the CGIAR in the emerging global system. The following are among the questions that need addressing:

- What facilitating and bridging role should centers be expected to play in the future? Can the "center without walls" concept become a reality?
- How will the centers' research capacity and the "center model" change in the light of new partnerships?
- What contributions can the CGIAR System make to development of methodologies and analysis of global and regional priorities?

The OC considers that one of the most significant tasks for the upcoming System Review should be clarification of the CGIAR's changing role within a system of global and regional partnerships.

2. System Review

The OC noted that at MTM96 in Jakarta the CGIAR asked the Committee to facilitate the preparation of the system review. A working group from the OC met in July and prepared a synopsis for the review. The OC sent this synopsis for comments to the CGIAR constituency. The comments received were shared with the CGIAR Chairman, who framed his proposals on the review in the light of these perspectives. The proposals are to be discussed with a stakeholder group during the ICW.

At its 11th meeting, the OC interacted with the CGIAR Chair. The CGIAR Chair noted that the review should take as a given the mission of the CGIAR as defined at Lucerne. He also noted that the review should be a forward looking exercise, suggesting changes where necessary, but that it should not be a "clean slate" undertaking starting with the question of whether there is need for a CGIAR. The CGIAR exists now and the review should help make it a more effective instrument for promoting sustainable agriculture for food security in developing countries.

The OC discussed its further role in the review. It concluded that it should actively comment on the terms of reference, composition of the panel, review process, and intermediary products of the review. It should, however, not assume a steering function for the review; instead it should provide oversight on this process as it does on all activities taken within the CGIAR. The oversight role implies ensuring that the review process used adheres to some basic principles and that the review is credible.

The OC regards the following as important in the design and conduct of the review:

- there should be a broadly agreed, substantive terms of reference;
- there should be an interaction between the panel and key CGIAR stakeholders at the start of the review;
- various CGIAR constituencies should have an opportunity to interact with the review panel;

- the diverse perspectives of CGIAR's partners should be adequately represented in the panel.

The OC discussed the key principles that should guide the review. It concluded that the review should be:

- independent;
- objective;
- transparent;
- interactive, and;
- forward-looking.

Accordingly, the OC suggests inclusion of these principles in the terms of reference.

Regarding the focus of the review, the view of the OC is that the review should address, in the first instance, the following:

- the role of the CGIAR system in meeting the research needs for development—in particular, its positioning within the global research and development system;
- organization and management of CGIAR research, including research partnerships;
- the role of the CGIAR in facilitating participation and access to research processes and products.

3. CGIAR Governance

The OC reflected on the role played by TAC in the CGIAR. It recalled the following observations the Committee made in the report of its 10th meeting held in Jakarta:

"The OC strongly welcomes a more strategic TAC...The new orientation of TAC would call for greater attention by the Committee to analysis of the CGIAR's role in the global system and its linkages with other components. This expanded responsibility would imply that TAC would advise the Members on whether the CGIAR's positioning in the global system is appropriate, given its overall mission and research conducted by other actors.

The OC notes that, over the years, one of the most important functions of TAC has been to define for the CGIAR the 'heartland' of the System's activities, and advise on ways of protecting this core. This has involved identifying the set of activities which best further the CGIAR's mission.

One implication of TAC's re-orientation is that the Committee needs to delegate some tasks to make room for the expanded responsibility... This delegation could be in the area of detailed review of center budgets. However, the OC considers that there will continue to be need for TAC involvement in resource allocation in order that recommendations on programs are coherent with those on budgets."

The OC notes that the planned shift to a more strategic TAC will be gradual as TAC's composition and work program changes. TAC has provided advice on overall priorities and strategies to the CGIAR. It now has an important role to play in assisting with the effort to translate these into programs.

The OC is pleased that most centers have adopted participatory corporate planning processes that involve intensively their important partners. The OC considers that TAC's inputs to these processes would contribute much to enhancing the congruence of System and center priorities and strategies. It would be better for such inputs from TAC to come early in the process. Commenting on corporate plans after a center and its partners reach agreements on respective future roles and activities may not be as effective. The OC encourages TAC to participate in corporate planning experiments and events of centers.

The OC will continue monitoring the evolution of TAC and comment, as necessary, on its changing responsibility, role, and structure.

4. Center Governance

The CGIAR Secretariat, in consultation with the CBC and OC, has developed a set of guides on center boards. The guideline on the role, responsibilities, and accountability of center boards was endorsed by the CGIAR at the MTM. This and the other six guides will be available in early 1997.

The OC reviewed the updated figures on the North-South and gender balance in the center boards. It notes that there has been a slight increase in the percentage of board members who are women (from 18 percent in 1995 to 20% in 1996). There has been no change in the North-South balance in the aggregate (45 percent of board members were from the South in 1995 and 1996). Both distributions show significant variation among the centers, and are critically unbalanced in some centers. The OC stresses the need for more vigilant efforts to generate further improvements in board diversity, to be complemented by similar improvements at the management level.

5. Due Diligence Matters

The OC reviewed critical developments at the centers, in particular the changes in center management.

The Committee commends the WARDA Board for the manner in which it handled the process of succession.

With respect to ICRISAT, the OC notes the enormous challenges that lie before the Board. The scheduling of the external review is timely. The OC suggests that the EPMP also analyzes the ICRISAT mandate. Many of the issues the review panel would be examining in the case of ICRISAT have broader implications for the CGIAR. The OC suggests that the panel provide recommendations specific to ICRISAT as well as potential lessons for the CGIAR System.

6. Internal Matters

Paul Egger informed the OC that he would like to step down from the Committee at the end of ICW96. The members expressed their appreciation of the leadership and dedication Egger provided to the Committee since its inception in 1993.

The OC elected Andrew Bennett as Chair. It also agreed to create the post of Vice-Chair and elected Fernando Chaparro to this post.

[At ICW96 the CGIAR endorsed the appointment of Cyrus Ndiritu to TAC. The CGIAR Chair nominated and the CGIAR endorsed the appointment of Mervat Badawi and William Dar to the membership positions vacated by Egger and Ndiritu.]

The OC agreed to reserve January 6-7, 1997 as a possible special meeting date. If confirmed, the meeting would be held in London.

CGIAR Secretariat
February 4, 1997